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Seventy-third year

Provisional

8217th meeting

Tuesday, 27 March 2018, 11.10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Blok	(Netherlands)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) (S/2018/243)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) (S/2018/243)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Lowcock is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2018/243, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017).

Recalling the latest note by the President of the Security Council on its working methods (S/2017/507), I want to encourage all participants, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and focus on key issues. Briefers are further encouraged to limit initial remarks to 15 minutes or less.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: As all members of the Council know, the Syrian conflict has now entered its eighth year. When weapons speak, civilians pay the price — a relentless price with horrific violence, bloodshed and unspeakable suffering. The past few months have been some of the worst yet for many civilians in Syria.

Today I want to start with the situation in eastern Ghouta. Since the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) on 24 February, military operations in eastern Ghouta, in particular air strikes, have reportedly killed more than 1,700 people. Thousands more have been injured. Attacks on critical civilian infrastructure, such as medical facilities, continue to be reported. There have been at least 28 reported attacks on health facilities since mid-February and more than 70 verified incidents since the beginning of the year. The World Health Organization has reported that attacks on health facilities, health workers and health infrastructure were recorded during the first two months of the year at three times the rate that we saw during 2017.

In recent weeks in Damascus city, at least 78 people were reportedly killed and another 230 injured by shells fired from eastern Ghouta. That includes reports of at least 35 people killed and scores wounded on 20 March, when Kashkul market in Jaramana, a suburb in the south-eastern part of the city, was struck by a rocket. Tens of thousands of civilians have been displaced from Douma, Harasta, Sagba and Kafr Batna in recent days and weeks. So far, reports indicate that some 80,000 civilians have been taken to places in Damascus city and rural Damascus. Nearly 20,000 combatants and civilians have been transported to locations in north-western Syria.

Nearly 52,000 civilians from eastern Ghouta are currently being hosted in eight collective shelters in rural Damascus. That displaced population has endured months of limited access to food, medical care and other essential items. In the words of the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, Ali Al-Za'tari, who met and spoke to some of them, those people are "tired, hungry, traumatized and afraid". Most of the collective shelters do not have the capacity or infrastructure to accommodate such large numbers of people. They are extremely overcrowded and severely lacking in basic water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. There are a number of serious protection concerns related to risks of gender-based violence, unaccompanied and separated children and restrictions on movement. The United Nations is not in charge of the management of those shelters. However, since 13 March, together with humanitarian partners, we have mobilized a rapid response to provide evacuees with basic support in close coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other local partners. So far, more than 130,000 non-food items have been distributed, 130 emergency

toilets have been installed, and water trucking services have been provided to most shelters. In addition, supplies to feed more than 50,000 people and a total of 38 mobile health teams and 18 mobile medical teams are currently providing support to those in need inside the shelters.

Humanitarian organizations also need access to the people still trapped within eastern Ghouta, in particular in Douma, where fighting and siege continue. The United Nations and its partners are ready to proceed to Douma with food for up to 16,500 people, as well as health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene supplies, but facilitation letters need to be signed by the Government of Syria.

I reiterate the Secretary-General's call on all parties to fully respect international humanitarian law and human rights law in order to ensure immediate humanitarian access and guarantee the protection of civilians, including in relation to displacements and evacuations. The United Nations and its partners require unimpeded access to all those affected by the situation in eastern Ghouta. That means access to the areas where civilians remain, through which they transit and to which they exit, such as collective shelters, in order to ensure that effective protection mechanisms are in place so that we can deter any possible violations and provide remedial protection support.

Eastern Ghouta is not the only place in which humanitarian needs continue to increase. In north-western Syria, in recent weeks, an estimated 183,500 people have been displaced by hostilities in Afrin district in Aleppo governorate. The majority — some 140,000 people — have fled to Tell Rifaat and the remainder have gone to Nubl, Al-Zahraa, Manbij, Hasakah and surrounding areas. That massive influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is putting a strain on host communities, which are already overwhelmed.

Two days ago, on 25 March, an inter-agency convoy to Tell Rifaat delivered assistance for some 50,000 people. However, overall, humanitarian partners are still struggling to gain sustainable access to the area. Moreover, access to Aleppo city for IDPs from Afrin district is currently restricted. Of particular concern are medical evacuations that are urgently required for severely sick people to receive care in specialized hospitals in Aleppo city. Four deaths due to the lack of proper health care have already been reported.

Between 50,000 and 70,000 people are estimated still to be in Afrin city. Humanitarian access to the city and its outer perimeters is possible through cross-border operations mandated by the Council. Today, the Government of Turkey told us that it is positively disposed towards such access, and we plan to run convoys in the very near future. We know that needs are very substantial.

In Idlib governorate, the situation remains catastrophic, with almost 400,000 people displaced since mid-December. Local capacity to assist is overstretched. Thousands more people are now arriving there from eastern Ghouta, with no sites or shelters available for the vast majority of them. We have received reports of an increase in violence in Idlib in recent days. According to local sources, on 20 March air strikes hit an IDP shelter on the outskirts of Haas village in southern rural Idlib governorate, reportedly killing at least 10 displaced people and injuring another 15. On 21 March, air strikes on Kafr Battikh village, also in southern rural Idlib governorate, reportedly killed scores more. The next day, the central market in Harim town was hit by an air strike, reportedly killing 35 people, including many women and children. On 12 March, air strikes also resumed in southern Syria, with attacks being reported in and around Dar'a city. There have been no air strikes in those areas since an agreement was reached last year on the establishment of a de-escalation zone for parts of the south of the country. That therefore appears to be a major unwelcome development.

Let me turn to Raqqa. On 19 March, we received approval from the Syrian authorities for an assessment mission to Raqqa city by the United Nations Mine Action Service, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Health Organization. As Council members know, we have been seeking agreement to that for some time. That was on 19 March.

Three days later, on 22 March, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security deployed a team to conduct a security assessment. They report that while the city is considered calm and stable, considerable risk remains. Raqqa city is still highly contaminated with landmines, unexploded ordnances, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices. We hope that access to Raqqa city will be possible for humanitarian aid deliveries via Qamishli, Manbij, Aleppo, Hamah

and Homs, depending on operational and logistical arrangements. The United Nations and our partners are now preparing a humanitarian assessment mission, which is likely to take place next week.

Next I shall address Rukban, on the Syria-Jordan border. United Nations partners received permission from the Syrian authorities on 8 March to organize a humanitarian convoy from Damascus to reach people in need along the Syria-Jordan border. Last week, on 19 March, the United Nations itself received permission to join that humanitarian mission. Preparations are ongoing, and a first humanitarian convoy is expected to deploy soon. As the Council knows, we have been seeking approval for that for many months.

As we sit here today, almost at the end of the month, we have reached some 137,000 people in need through inter-agency convoys — that is, cross-line convoys sent to hard-to-reach and besieged areas — to Tell Rifaat, Al-Dar al-Kabirah and Douma. That is limited, incremental progress, compared to the first part of the year, thanks to the extraordinary efforts of the team on the ground and some of those around this table. But we are essentially just given crumbs — an occasional convoy here and there, often, coincidentally, shortly before our monthly briefings to the Council.

A total of 5.6 million Syrians in acute need cannot live on crumbs, and with a quarter of the year gone, our level of access is currently far worse than it was this time last year. We need the support of all Council members and members of the International Syria Support Group humanitarian task force to do their part to exert their individual and collective influence over the parties.

A few days ago, the Government of Syria and others asked for more United Nations help with humanitarian aid in eastern Ghouta. In response, we have, first, proposed that a team of United Nations emergency response experts be deployed to strengthen efforts on the ground. Visa requests for the team have been submitted. Secondly, we have confirmed a new allocation of $20 million from the Syria Humanitarian Fund, which is managed by my Office, for eastern Ghouta and those displaced from Afrin to provide shelter materials, improve sanitation for displaced people, ensure that safe water is available, provide life-saving medicines and medical services and put in place measures to enhance protection in relocation sites.

The United Nations and its partners, on average, reach 7.5 million people every month with life-saving humanitarian assistance across the whole of Syria. Clearly, without that assistance, the situation would be even more catastrophic than it is now and the loss of life even greater. The United Nations has no money of its own to do those things. We can do them only because we receive voluntary contributions from our donors. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported our appeal over the last year, including our top donors: the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Norway, Canada, Japan, Denmark, Sweden, Qatar, Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Resolution 2401 (2018) was adopted just over a month ago. I ask all in the Council to make the resolution a reality. Whatever the difficulty, the United Nations and its partners remain determined to follow through, for the sake of the Syrian people.

The President: I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Recently, a Dutch photographer working with Save the Children published a photo album featuring 48 Syrian children, all seven years old. Those photos were school portraits, like we all had taken when we were young. The children were born in Syria, but they had to flee. They are as old as the Syrian war, so they have never seen their country at peace. Their memories of their homeland are fading. Sometimes they cannot remember their country at all, nor their family members left behind. But by giving those young children a public face, the photographer has tried to restore some of the dignity sacrificed to a war in which all humanity seems lost. I have here a photo of Nour.

Those children were relatively lucky; they were able to escape. At the same time, inside Syria, during seven years of war, thousands of children have been killed. I myself am a father, and I am certainly not the only parent in this Chamber. Images of children affected by war should leave no one unmoved. Despite any differences between us, we should at least have one thing in common: the belief that protecting children should come first. Yet, such protection is lacking. The Syrian crisis is, above all, a protection crisis — a grave violation of the long-established norm to protect civilians and their belongings in the time of war.

Together, we — the international community — have expressed our determination to prevent conflict and save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. And where conflict cannot be prevented, we have agreed to regulate the conduct of warfare. One of the very first steps to that end was taken in Russia, almost 150 years ago. In Saint Petersburg, it was decided to forbid weapons that cause unnecessary suffering. Since those first steps, the body of international humanitarian law has grown considerably, including through the adoption of the Hague and Geneva Conventions. The imperative of those laws has always been to protect civilians in conflict, to spare them from disaster, save them from harm and respect their dignity.

Sadly, what we see in Syria today is the exact opposite. Every day, many are showing total disregard for civilians.

In eastern Ghouta, the Syrian regime and its allies, including Russia, have trapped hundreds of thousands of civilians and are relentlessly continuing their offensive. The United Nations has reported air strikes on densely populated areas, blatant attacks targeting hospitals and medical personnel, the use of starvation as a weapon of war and the use of chemical weapons. Many innocent children, women and men are suffering. They should be protected. Yet instead, families are seeing their homes destroyed, their loved ones killed and their dignity shattered. In Afrin, the effects of the Turkey-led offensive are clear for all to see: a worsening of the already precarious humanitarian situation, with more than 160,000 displaced people and a further obstacle to efforts to fight the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). I ask Turkey not to extend its military activities to other border regions in Syria or Iraq.

Four weeks ago, the Council adopted resolution 2401 (2018). It is telling that in 2018, the Council should need to spell out that warring parties should immediately lift all sieges in Syria and grant unimpeded humanitarian access to those in acute need. Those are by no means exceptional demands. They are basic obligations under international humanitarian law, developed over decades to instil minimum standards of human decency in warfare. Not even the presence of terrorists is an excuse for disregarding those standards. It is humiliating that the Council is unable to enforce those minimum standards. If the Council is not willing or able to do it, who is? With all that in mind, we should not forget that the responsibility, and indeed the obligation, to execute the Council's decisions lies with individual Member States. So what should be done?

First, we should reaffirm these norms and enforce the relevant resolutions. We call on all parties to the Syrian conflict — including the Syrian regime, Russia, Iran, Turkey and armed opposition groups — to respect and implement the Council's decisions. Secondly, we must strengthen resolution 2401 (2018), with United Nations monitoring of the implementation of the ceasefire and with full access for fact-finding missions to sites and collective shelters housing internally displaced persons. These missions are ready to go; we need their impartial information. Thirdly, with regard to accountability, if there is to be any credible, stable and lasting peace in Syria, the current culture of impunity must end. All those guilty of crimes must be brought to justice. The perpetrators of crimes, including ISIS and Al-Qaida, must know that they are being watched, followed and identified. They must know that files are being compiled with a view to prosecuting them for crimes that may include genocide. They must know that one day they will be held accountable.

We urge all States to increase their support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, which aims to ensure that information about serious crimes is collected, analysed and preserved for future prosecutions. The Netherlands again calls on all Council members to support referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

What will become of the children in the photographs I mentioned? Will they one day be able to return to Syria? Like all children, they long for a normal life, for stability, for safety. The Syrian regime believes in a military solution. But there is none. There are no winners in this war. But it is clear who is losing — the ordinary people of Syria. In these most extreme circumstances we commend the incredible courage and perseverance of the humanitarian aid workers.

It is up to us to restore credibility to the Council. It is up to us to ensure a negotiated political process, in which all Syrians and other relevant actors are represented. And it is up to us to end the agony and restore dignity and humanity to the people of Syria.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): We welcome you, Sir, in presiding over this important meeting. I am delivering this statement on behalf of Kuwait and Sweden. At the outset, I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock, for his briefing.

Today I will address three main areas: first, the status of the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018); secondly, measures needed to improve the humanitarian situation; and thirdly, the responsibility of the parties to implement the resolution.

First, on the status of the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), we are meeting today one month after its unanimous adoption by the Security Council, calling on all parties to cease hostilities without delay for 30 days following the adoption of the resolution. We deplore the fact that it has not yet been implemented. However, we must continue to do everything in our power to ensure the resolution's full implementation throughout Syria. The increased number of humanitarian convoys entering the besieged areas during the month of March shows that partial delivery was achieved by comparison to the complete deadlock in access in previous months. That indicates that progress can be made in implementing the resolution, and we must build on that progress.

We affirm that the provisions of the resolution will remain valid beyond the first 30 days after its adoption. We look forward to continued reports from the Secretariat on the status of implementation through monthly briefings, as stipulated in the resolution. In that regard, we support the proposal for providing the Council with further regular updates.

We appreciate the continued efforts of the United Nations to facilitate talks among all parties in eastern Ghouta with the goal of securing a ceasefire. We are particularly concerned about the continued military offensive by the Syrian authorities in eastern Ghouta, as well as air strikes on Dar'a and Idlib. The shelling of Damascus from eastern Ghouta is also a matter of concern. All of those acts of violence have claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians.

Secondly, on measures needed to improve the humanitarian situation, we must take the necessary measures to protect civilians fleeing eastern Ghouta and to improve the humanitarian situation in collective shelters. As we have said before, implementing the provisions of resolution 2401 (2018) is the only way to improve the humanitarian situation and to achieve tangible progress in that regard. Those provisions stipulate that there must be a cessation of hostilities and that access for humanitarian aid to reach the civilian population must be enabled. Regarding the humanitarian situation in eastern Ghouta, we have five points to convey to the relevant parties, which represent our special concerns about the protection of civilians.

First, all evacuations must be voluntary. People must have the right to return and to choose safe places to go to. Secondly, any negotiations on the evacuation of civilians should include civilian representatives, such as local councils. Thirdly, humanitarian aid convoys should continue to enter eastern Ghouta for the benefit of those who decided to stay there. Those convoys should occur on a weekly basis, as stipulated in resolution 2401 (2018), according to the United Nations assessment of needs, including medical supplies, and with full access for United Nations staff. Fourthly, human rights violations, including detentions, disappearances and forced conscriptions, must end. Those are serious protection concerns for civilians staying in eastern Ghouta and for those leaving it. We therefore encourage the United Nations to register the names of those evacuated and their destinations and to reinforce its presence in the collective shelters for internally displaced persons, including through the use of monitors to protect them and prevent sexual violence. We call on the Syrian authorities to grant immediate permission for that. Fifthly, the deteriorating situation in the collective shelters for the internally displaced persons should be improved as quickly as possible as the number of new arrivals continues to rise.

We are deeply concerned that the United Nations partners are bearing the brunt of a burden beyond their capacity. It will therefore be essential to make the maximum use of the United Nations, its staff and its resources in order to assist in managing the increasingly crowded collective shelters. We welcome the United Nations plans to increase staff on the ground to that end, and we encourage the United Nations to do the same for eastern Ghouta as soon as the security situation allows. We call on the Syrian authorities to grant visas for additional United Nations staff immediately.

Thirdly, on the responsibility of the parties to implement the resolution, we have a collective responsibility, as members of the Council and, specifically, as parties with influence, to work with the Syrian authorities and urge them to implement the provisions of resolution 2401 (2018) according to international humanitarian law. We expect the guarantors of the Astana agreement, Russia, Iran and Turkey, to achieve progress towards the fulfilment of the commitments undertaken in the statement they issued on 16 March in advance of their summit meeting, to be held in Istanbul on 4 April. Those commitments include, first, ensuring rapid, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian aid to areas affected by the conflict; secondly, increasing their efforts, as guarantors of the ceasefire agreement, to ensure observance of the respective agreements; and thirdly, pursuing their efforts to implement the provisions of resolution 2401 (2018).

In conclusion, we affirm our full commitment to continuing to follow up closely on the status of the implementation of the resolution in the monthly reports to the Council. We will spare no effort to make progress in its implementation. This month marks the beginning of the eighth year of the conflict in Syria. Sadly, there is still a need for an end to the violence, sustained humanitarian and medical aid through weekly convoys across conflict lines, evacuation operations, the protection of civilians and hospitals, and the lifting of the siege.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank you, Foreign Minister Blok, for presiding over this meeting, and I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for once again laying out the facts about what is happening in Syria. I also want to personally welcome Karen Pierce to the Council as the new Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom. I know all of us in the Chamber look forward to working with her.

Today we have a very difficult subject to address: siege, starvation and surrender. That is the awful, unceasing rhythm of the Syrian war. As we meet today, the third step, surrender, is taking place in eastern Ghouta. After years of enduring siege and starvation, residents are surrendering eastern Ghouta. The terrible irony of this moment must be stated and acknowledged. In the 30 days since the Security Council demanded a ceasefire, the bombardment of the people of eastern Ghouta has only increased and now, at the end of the so-called ceasefire, eastern Ghouta has nearly fallen.

History will not be kind when it judges the effectiveness of the Council in relieving the suffering of the Syrian people. Seventeen hundred Syrian civilians have been killed in the past month alone. Hospitals and ambulances are being deliberately targeted with bombs and artillery. Schools are being hit, like the one in eastern Ghouta that was bombed just last week, killing 15 children. Siege, starvation and surrender.

I would like to ask my Security Council colleagues to consider whether we are wrong when we point to the Russian and Iranian forces working alongside Al-Assad as being responsible for the slaughter. Russia voted for the so-called ceasefire in Syria last month (see S/PV.8188). More than that, Russia took its time painstakingly negotiating resolution 2401 (2018), which demanded the ceasefire. If we watched closely during the negotiations, we could see our Russian friends constantly leaving the room to confer with their Syrian counterparts. The possibilities for what was going on are only two. Either Russia was informing its Syrian colleagues about the content of the negotiations, or Russia was taking directions from its Syrian colleagues about the content of the negotiations. Either way, Russia cynically negotiated a ceasefire that it instantly defied.

Russia even had the audacity to claim that it is the only Council member implementing resolution 2401 (2018). How can that possibly be true when in the first four days after the so-called ceasefire, Russian military aircraft conducted at least 20 daily bombing missions on Damascus and eastern Ghouta, while the people of Syria remained under siege? The so-called ceasefire was intended to allow humanitarian access to sick and starving civilians. Russia even doubled down on its cynicism by proposing five-hour pauses in the fighting. It said that they were necessary to allow humanitarian convoys to get through, but Russian and Syrian bombs continue to prevent the delivery of humanitarian aid. Only after territory falls into the hands of the Al-Assad Government and its allies do they allow food and medicine to be delivered. Russia and Syria's rationalization is that they have to continue to bomb in eastern Ghouta in order to combat what they call terrorists. That is a transparent excuse for the Russians and Al-Assad to maintain their assault.

Meanwhile, from the very beginning, the opposition groups in eastern Ghouta expressed their readiness to implement the ceasefire. They told the Council that they welcomed the resolution. Russia's response was to call those groups terrorists and keep pummelling

civilians into submission, while the people of Syria continue to starve.

Last week, after Syrian civilians had spent years barely surviving, an agreement was reached to allow them to leave eastern Ghouta. Who brokered it? Russia. So we see the cycle being completed. The people of eastern Ghouta are surrendering. That is the ugly reality on the ground in Syria today. Cynical accusations of bad faith from Russia will not stop us from speaking out, and their blatantly false narratives will not keep us from telling the world about Russia's central role in bombing the Syrian people into submission.

Fifteen days ago, when it was apparent that the Russian, Syrian and Iranian regimes were utterly ignoring the ceasefire, the United States developed a plan for a tougher and more targeted ceasefire focused on Damascus city and eastern Ghouta. Despite overwhelming evidence that the ceasefire was being ignored, some of our colleagues urged us to give resolution 2401 (2018) a chance to work. Reluctantly, we agreed and put off introducing the resolution. Now, more than 80 per cent of eastern Ghouta is controlled by Al-Assad and his allies. Their deception, hypocrisy and brutality have overtaken the chance of a ceasefire in eastern Ghouta, and for that we should all be ashamed.

If we were upholding our responsibility as a Security Council, we would adopt a resolution today recognizing the reality of what happened in eastern Ghouta. A responsible Security Council would condemn the Syrian authorities, along with Russia and Iran, for launching a military offensive to seize eastern Ghouta the same day that we called for a ceasefire. A responsible Security Council would condemn the Al-Assad regime for deliberately blocking convoys of humanitarian aid during its military campaign and removing medical items from convoys that attempted to reach eastern Ghouta. A responsible Security Council would recognize that the provision of humanitarian aid was never safe, unimpeded or sustained, and that there was no lifting of sieges. A responsible Security Council would express its outrage that at least 1,700 civilians were killed during a military campaign that it demanded to come to a halt — 1,700 civilians who should have been spared in the ceasefire we demanded, but who died on our watch.

But we cannot. We cannot take those actions because Russia will stop at nothing to use its permanent seat on the Council to shield its ally Bashar Al-Assad from even the faintest criticism. And we cannot take those actions because instead of calling out the ways in which Al-Assad, Russia and Iran made a mockery of our calls for a ceasefire, too many members of the Council wanted to wait. That is a travesty. This should be a day of shame for every member of the Council and it should be a lesson about what happens when we focus on fleeting displays of unity instead of on what is right. For those who think otherwise, the people of eastern Ghouta deserve an explanation.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mark Lowcock for his briefing and to commend him on his tireless efforts and those of his team in their response to the urgent and severe humanitarian situation in Syria.

To address that urgency and severity, a month ago almost to the day the Security Council adopted resolution 2401 (2018). We thus collectively and unanimously demanded that all the parties to the conflict cease hostilities throughout the country to allow for sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to civilians in need and for medical evacuations.

A month later, what is the situation? Not only has resolution 2401 (2018) not been implemented, but the humanitarian situation in Syria has worsened. The civilian population is living in despair, trapped between bargaining and fighting, particularly in eastern Ghouta.

Over the past few weeks, not only has the fighting has not subsided; it has doubled in intensity, with a land offensive launched by the regime, supported by its allies Russia and Iran. The carefully planned offensive was unremitting, using the double strategy of terror and parallel negotiations that was used in Aleppo to obtain the surrender of combatants and the displacement of civilians. For a month there has not been a single day when eastern Ghouta, which has been besieged and starved for years, has not suffered indiscriminate shelling by the regime and its supporters. They have systematically bombed schools and hospitals and killed more than 1,700 civilians, including more than 300 children. Those deaths are the result of a deliberate strategy of the Syrian regime to forcibly bend an entire population, annihilate any form of opposition and remain in power.

Nothing should justify breaches of international humanitarian law. Not one humanitarian convoy has been authorized to enter eastern Ghouta since 15 March, and almost no humanitarian assistance has

been delivered in recent weeks. Meanwhile, there are immense needs among those still in eastern Ghouta, the majority of whom are women and children.

For several days we have been witnessing forced evacuations of populations from eastern Ghouta, which could constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes. We have demanded humanitarian access to eastern Ghouta in order to provide assistance to people in their own homes, where they wish to stay as long as the ceasefire allows. That was the reason for the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018). Instead, we have witnessed just the opposite — an escalation of violence to force a massive displacement of civilians. Bombing has forced civilians, approximately 80,000 people, to flee. The displacement of people from eastern Ghouta is an integral part of the military strategy of the Syrian regime to force the opposition to capitulate. Once again, civilians are the primary victims.

As I said, those forced displacements could constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes. Evidence of such crimes will be collected, preserved and used. We were clear on that point during the Arria-formula Council meeting with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights a few days ago. Some 55,000 civilians are now in eight collective camps managed by the Syrian regime around eastern Ghouta, without water or electricity and in disastrous sanitary conditions. Their lot has not improved; their hell has simply moved a few kilometres away. We are extremely concerned about the fate of those civilians who now live in overcrowded conditions, with no assurances of protection or security, with no guarantee that they will return home.

How do we protect civilians in the situation I have just described? It is absolutely urgent to protect those who can still be protected. Although the 30-day cessation of hostilities demanded by resolution 2401 (2018) has still not been implemented, that demand remains, more urgent and relevant than ever. The resolution is still the framework for our collective action. In that regard, and in line with the briefing just given by Mark Lowcock, I would like to underscore three vital demands.

First, it is indispensable and urgent that humanitarian convoys be allowed to enter eastern Ghouta daily and with adequate security. Although humanitarian needs are great, the regime continues to deliberately block aid. United Nations convoys must be able to enter and make deliveries. Fighting must cease long enough to allow for delivery, unloading and distribution of supplies, including of medical assistance.

The second demand concerns civilians who remain in Ghouta, who have the right to emergency humanitarian assistance and to protection. Aid must reach them where they are. To that end, the United Nations and its international and local humanitarian partners must be able to work safely on site to assess the needs of those populations. It is an obligation under international humanitarian law, but it is the minimum required to provide tangible assistance to those concerned. The protection that is due them under international humanitarian law must be unconditionally guaranteed. In that regard I call again on the responsibility of all actors with influence on the Syrian regime.

The third demand, which has taken on new importance in recent days, is for assistance to be provided to the displaced civilians in camps outside Ghouta. Very concretely, that means that those populations, who have been forced to leave everything behind in order to survive, must be assured of their safety, access to basic necessities and a chance to return home when they so desire. Care must be taken that they are not threatened with retaliation, threats or persecution of any kind.

In order to ensure that they are protected, the United Nations and its partners must be able to escort civilians who have been evacuated from their point of departure to their destination in the collective shelters. The United Nations and its partners must be granted continuous access to civilians living in those camps. We hope that the United Nations can strengthen its support to displaced persons who have fled eastern Ghouta. That would call for an increase in the number of international staff on site. We hope that approval will be granted to that end as soon as possible. It would also call for security guarantees for humanitarian workers.

The situation in Afrin is also extremely worrisome. A great many civilians are in a critical situation. More that 180,000 people have been displaced. A single convoy was authorized, yesterday, which is insufficient given the tremendous needs of the population. Ongoing fighting in Afrin has forced the Syrian Democratic Forces to halt operations against Da'esh, whose threat, as we all know, has not dissappeared. Our position on the issue is the same. The legitimate concerns of Turkey with regard to the security of its borders cannot in any way justify a lasting military presence deep inside Syria.

More than ever, we need the fighting to end. We call on all parties on the ground to conclude the negotiations under way and respect a cessation of hostilities. We support the efforts of the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and his commitment to resuming the Geneva process and to reaching a lasting political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) that starts with the establishment of an inclusive constitutional committee, under the auspices of Mr. De Mistura. It is the only way to end the Syrian crisis.

It is absolutely essential to work on both the humanitarian and political fronts. I appeal on behalf of France, first, to those who can make a difference on the ground, starting with Russia. It is never to late to save lives. Let us be well aware that without urgent, decisive action, the worst is undoubtedly yet to come in the form of a worsening and enlargement of the conflict.

The time has come for us to learn seriously the lessons of the Syrian tragedy. This tragedy is the illustration of a new global disorder where the rappelling ropes have disappeared due to a lack of strong international governance, a lack of a power of last resort and a lack of convergence among key actors — to which we add the well-known attitude of Russia.

In other words, if we want to avoid other tragedies of this type in future, it is essential to structure the multipolar world in which we now find ourselves around a robust multilateralism embodied by a reformed United Nations. It is the only alternative to the fragmentation of the world and the return to the zones of influence — and our history teaches us all the dangers of that — and it is with the settlement of the Syrian crisis, which is our priority today and which is the emergency before us, one of the other challenges of our generation.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank you, Mr. President, both for being here today to underscore the vital importance of this topic and, in particular, for your very powerful statement. The United Kingdom supports your call for a referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

I also wish to express our thanks to the Under-Secretary-General for his continued efforts to keep the Security Council informed of the toll that hostilities are having on civilians in Syria. We also thank him for the heroic efforts of all his teams on the ground. Their efforts are much supported by most of us on the Council.

The Under-Secretary-General's briefing eloquently underscores why it is essential that the Council comes together to agree on concrete steps to allow the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to fulfil its mandate to ensure humanitarian assistance and protection for everybody who needs it. Ambassador Haley has laid the situation bare, Ambassador Delattre has set out the regime's intentions, and Ambassador Alotaibi has focused on the need for protection and registration. I support their calls. I will not rehearse a catalogue of suffering that we have heard expressed so eloquently today, but that omission should not be taken as any indication that the United Kingdom is not as horrified as others by what is happening on the ground.

Specifically, it is diabolical that access is actually worse in the face of such suffering. Diabolical is a strong word, but there are no others to describe what is happening. The worst destruction and suffering has continued in eastern Ghouta. Those who support Al-Assad have not taken steps to help stop the violence. Instead, Al-Assad and his supporters have violated the strong words of the Security Council in resolution 2401 (2018), making mockery of the Council's authority, as Ambassador Delattre stated.

Since 11 March, an estimated 100,000 people have left eastern Ghouta and are in makeshift reception sites in rural Damascus. Thousands more have been bused to Idlib. Because there is no independent monitoring nor provisions for civilian safety, those fleeing and those staying remain vulnerable and at risk of mistreatment and abuse by the regime, including being detained, disappeared or separated from their families. Humanitarians, health workers and first responders on the ground report that the regime is deliberately targeting them. That is illegal, and those who help the Al-Assad regime are complicit in that illegality.

The situation continues even for those who are left behind. An estimated 150,000 civilians remain in eastern Ghouta. They suffer from acute food shortages and lack of medical supplies. They are afraid, and above all they remember how the regime punished the civilians who fled from eastern Aleppo in December 2016. That is why Ambassador Alotaibi's call for protection and registration is so urgent.

We welcome United Nations plans to scale up support to deal with the dire situations in the internally displaced persons camps and collective shelters. We call on Russia to use its influence with the regime to

ensure that the United Nations and its partners can also provide assistance and protection for those who remain in eastern Ghouta. Whether civilians choose to stay or leave, it is essential that they be protected against attack and have access to the essentials to survive. This is not just a plea on the grounds of humanity; it is a requirement under international humanitarian law. It is the job of the Council and all members of the Council to uphold international humanitarian law. Those who side with the regime in its actions are themselves guilty of violating that law.

In concluding, I would like to highlight two further areas. The suffering of the Syrian people continues in Idlib, where civilians have been under attack by regime forces for many years. More than a million internally displaced Syrians live there, including those who have fled eastern Ghouta. In Afrin, we recognize Turkey's legitimate interest in the security of its borders, but at the same time we remain concerned about the impact of operations on the humanitarian situation, and my Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have raised the need for protection of civilians and access with President Erdoğan and his Ministers. It was good to hear from the Under-Secretary-General that there may at last be signs of progress in Afrin.

After seven years of conflict, over 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria. The Al-Assad regime has created the situation and is now preventing humanitarian actors from relieving some of the horror it has inflicted. We call on Russia to use its influence to ensure that at a minimum the United Nations can fulfil its mandate to ensure humanitarian assistance and protection for Syrians on the basis of need, regardless of any other considerations.

I was at Geneva in 2012. I think we all feel that that was a huge missed opportunity, in the light of events. The situation has escalated every year since that time, and, as the Under-Secretary-General said, the level of access is worse. The Council has a small opportunity to put measures in place to reduce the risk of reprisals. As you said, Mr. President, if the Security Council cannot do it, who can?

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his comprehensive briefing. I also wish to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, His Excellency Mr. Stephanus Abraham Blok, who is presiding over today's meeting.

Kazakhstan remains committed to all Security Council resolutions aimed at solving humanitarian issues in Syria. We believe that it is most important to preserve all possible humanitarian-access modalities, including cross-border assistance, which are indispensable in bringing humanitarian aid to millions of people in Syria.

Implementing resolution 2401 (2018) is a collective responsibility, with each Council member and State Member of the United Nations playing a significant role. We must all continue to do everything we can to ensure full implementation across Syria. We look forward to continued reporting on the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) to the Council through the regular Syria briefings and reports of the Secretary-General, as stipulated in the resolution.

Urgent attention must be focused on long-term humanitarian assistance, with the assurance of safe humanitarian access by the United Nations and other aid agencies, and evacuation of the wounded. We commend the sterling contribution of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Health Organization and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent for their provision of increased medical supplies and life-saving services, including surgical procedures. In that regard, we welcome the increase in humanitarian convoys gaining access to besieged areas in Syria in March, compared to previous months.

It is necessary to take note of the worrisome humanitarian situation in Syria, as fighting in different parts of the country are causing massive displacement. We endorse the appeal of the United Nations to help stem the catastrophic situation for tens of thousands of people, from both eastern Ghouta and Afrin. We look forward to the next round of talks, to be held in mid-May in our capital, Astana, where the stepping up of efforts to ensure observance of the relevant agreements will be addressed.

We also believe that the dialogue between Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and the Government of Syria should be ongoing. We reiterate that all obligations under international humanitarian law must be respected by all parties. A further United Nations needs-assessment mission to these troubled areas, similar to that which Under-Secretary-General Lowcock led recently, may be required very soon. The Syrian authorities must cooperate fully with the United Nations and relevant humanitarian organizations in

facilitating the unhindered provision of humanitarian assistance and thereby mitigating the suffering.

Lastly, we are of the view that the crisis in Syria can be resolved only through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process, based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex), subsequent Security Council resolutions and relevant statements of the International Syria Support Group.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this meeting and the briefing by Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, on the humanitarian situation in Syria. We also welcome your presence here today, Sir, in presiding over our meeting.

Peru deeply regrets that violence and human suffering continue to characterize the situation in Syria, 30 days after the humanitarian ceasefire demanded by the Council. Resolution 2401 (2018) remains in full force, and we consider that the Syrian Government and other actors with the capacity to influence developments on the ground are obliged to ensure its full implementation. The ceasefire should be immediate and enable unrestricted access to humanitarian assistance throughout Syrian territory. While there has been some limited progress in that regard, the delivery of humanitarian assistance must be continuous and unrestricted.

In view of the Council's responsibilities in line with international law and international humanitarian law, Peru will continue to advocate for the protection of civilians in all conflicts and humanitarian crises. An indeterminate number of Syrian citizens, including thousands of women and children, have been driven out of eastern Ghouta by the violence. We note with concern that the shelters in the vicinity of Damascus cannot cope and that they lack food, clean water and medical supplies. We must remember that international humanitarian law has mandatory provisions for the evacuation of civilians. It is also compulsory to take measures to safeguard private property from looting and destruction. Syrian citizens must be able to return to their homes and businesses when security conditions improve. We must also protect the majority of the remaining population in eastern Ghouta, who are particularly vulnerable to reprisals, forced recruitment and sexual violence.

We are also concerned about the humanitarian situation in Afrin, Idlib and Raqqa, among other areas of Syria. The responsibility to protect civilians cannot be conditional or subordinated to political or strategic interests. We highlight the efforts of the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies, such as the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, to assist people in such a difficult situation. They have our full support.

Given the intensification of violence in recent weeks and its devastating consequences for the population, we must once again reiterate how urgent it is to make progress towards achieving a political settlement on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). In that regard, we hope that progress will soon be made in the establishment and composition of the constitutional committee agreed on in Sochi. All the Syrian parties, and especially the Government, must engage constructively in this.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his comprehensive briefing. We want to express our appreciation to the United Nations and humanitarian partners for their continued selfless and courageous service in providing assistance to all Syrians in difficult circumstances.

We remain concerned about the humanitarian crisis in all the areas of Syria where it is prevalent. As the Under-Secretary-General said, the Syrian war has entered its eighth year, bringing unspeakable suffering to the people of the country. The escalation of violence that we witnessed last month in eastern Ghouta and other parts of the country has been a source of extremely grave concern. According to the statement issued on 21 March by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, shelter, protection, water and sanitation remain the key priority humanitarian needs of the internally displaced. In that regard, we thank the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for providing much-needed assistance.

Alleviating the suffering of Syrians requires urgent and coordinated action on the part of all actors, while respecting the relevant resolutions of the Council, particularly resolution 2401 (2018). It was encouraging that the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2401 (2018), demanding a cessation of hostilities throughout Syria for at least 30 days so as to ensure the safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and medical evacuations. In that regard, while much remains to be done to fully implement the resolution, compared to the previous month there has been positive

action, including aid delivery to some of the areas that are especially badly affected and difficult to reach. The conflict has also diminished in intensity in some areas, according to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/243).

However, this does not mean that the action taken has been sufficient. We therefore stress that it is vital to redouble our efforts to do everything possible to fully and comprehensively implement the resolution with a sense of urgency and enhanced political will. We believe that what the people of Syria need is a cessation of hostilities, along with protection and access to basic goods and services. All of those demands are contained and affirmed in resolution 2401 (2018). All Syrian parties should therefore respect and fully implement resolution 2401 (2018), and all States that have influence over the parties should try to bring the maximum pressure to bear on them, with the ultimate objective of helping to fully operationalize the resolution, which was adopted unanimously by the Council. In that regard, we hope that the Astana guarantors, Russia, Turkey and Iran, will play their role in implementing resolution 2401 (2018), strengthening the ceasefire arrangements and improving humanitarian conditions, as stated in their final statement of 16 March.

In addition, while we acknowledge that the United Nations and its humanitarian partners have been able to reach millions of Syrians using all modes of aid delivery, the fact remains that humanitarian access, particularly inter-agency convoys, remains a critical challenge. In that connection, it is absolutely vital to ensure safe, sustained and need-based humanitarian access so that life-saving aid can reach all Syrians in need.

Let me conclude by reaffirming that only a comprehensive political dialogue, under the auspices of the United Nations, can ultimately end the humanitarian tragedy in Syria. We reiterate our position that the only solution to the Syrian crisis is a political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015). We support the continued efforts of the Special Envoy and encourage all Syrian parties to engage with him constructively and meaningfully in order to revitalize the Geneva intra-Syrian talks and support the establishment of a constitutional committee, in line with the outcome of the Sochi congress. We fully concur with the Secretary-General, who states, in his report of 20 March, "Political efforts to bring the war to an end must be accorded priority and redoubled by all parties to the conflict." (*S/2018/243, para. 48*)

While the primary responsibility for resolving the conflict lies with the Syrians themselves — a principle that is firmly embedded in resolution 2254 (2015) — the Council also has an important role to play in supporting the efforts in a spirit of unity, which we believe can have a positive impact on the ground in alleviating the suffering of all Syrians. That may be a tall order, in the light of the fragmentation that Ambassador Delattre mentioned earlier. However, the effort must be made.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome your presence, Sir, and the fact that you are presiding over the work of the Security Council today. We would also like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for his briefing. We support him in the difficult work with which he is entrusted.

We must once again express our regret that this conflict has continued for eight years and that we are still witnessing the ongoing sieges and violence being endured by the Syrian people, particularly women and children. In addition to living with the psychological consequences of the situation, they urgently need humanitarian assistance. We unequivocally condemn the ongoing bombardment of civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools, and the military activities in residential areas in the cities of Damascus, Afrin and Idlib, as well as in eastern Ghouta. They have only led to more civilians being killed, wounded and displaced. According to the most recent report of the Secretary General (S/2018/243), between December and February alone, there were 385,000 internally displaced persons and 2.3 million people living in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

We regret that so far there are still obstacles preventing the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). We call on all parties involved to make every effort to ensure the effective implementation of the resolution throughout Syria in order to facilitate the safe, sustained and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid and services, as well as to enable the medical evacuation of those who are seriously ill or injured. In addition, according to the same report, since October 2017, 86,000 civilians have returned to the city of Raqqa, of whom 20,000 arrived in February alone. Regrettably, 130 civilians have died and 658 have been seriously injured by explosive remnants of war and anti-personnel mines. In that regard, we would like to highlight the visit by the United Nations mission to Raqqa last week. We reiterate that the work of clearing

anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war is crucial to facilitating the safe return of the displaced.

While it does not reflect what has gone on throughout Syrian territory, it is important to highlight the recent delivery of humanitarian aid through convoys, of which the first, on 5 March, was to Douma in eastern Ghouta, bringing food for more than 27,000 people. We also believe that cross-border assistance is an important part of the response to the situation, and we highlight the food assistance to 2 million people and the dispatch by the United Nations to areas of northern and southern Syria of 449 trucks carrying aid for 1 million people.

We welcome the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, all the humanitarian agencies concerned and the Russian Federation that have enabled humanitarian assistance to be delivered to various populations, in particular in eastern Ghouta, which three convoys recently entered. We call for that assistance to continue as safely as possible. In that regard, we believe it is important to strengthen the dialogue and coordination among the humanitarian agencies, the United Nations and the Syrian Government in order to facilitate the entry of convoys and humanitarian aid workers, as well as the safe and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons. We emphasize the dangerous work of the personnel of the various agencies and humanitarian assistance bodies, whose staff risk their own lives in carrying out their dangerous work on the ground. We therefore reiterate the importance of full respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We want to take this opportunity to reiterate how important it is to build on the political momentum following the commitments made at the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi. That should be the channel for reinforcing the Geneva process, led by the United Nations in the context of resolution 2254 (2015). We hope for the speedy implementation of the Sochi outcome and, as a result, the establishment of a constitutional committee that can facilitate a viable political transition. In that regard, we support the results of the latest Astana meeting, which enabled the agreements establishing de-escalation zones to be strengthened. We hope they will be reflected on the ground so as to reduce the violence and meet the urgent humanitarian needs. We condemn any attempt to foment fragmentation or sectarianism in Syria and believe that it is the Syrian people who must freely decide their future and their political leadership in the context of their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Finally, we reiterate that the only way to resolve the conflict is through an inclusive, negotiated and agreed political process, led by and for the Syrian people, and aimed at achieving sustainable peace on their territory without foreign pressure of any kind.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to welcome you as you preside over the Council today, Sir. We also welcome Ms. Karen Pierce, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom, who is now here with us. We thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

The difficult humanitarian situation continues in a number of areas in Syria. The Russian Federation has been taking active steps to normalize things, including within the framework of the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). While some here may not like it, it is a fact that we are the only ones who have been making concrete efforts to implement resolution 2401 (2018). Since we first established humanitarian pauses, with the assistance of the Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic, and the participation and oversight of the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, nearly 121,000 people have been evacuated, on a strictly voluntarily basis — let me stress that — from eastern Ghouta. Many of them have talked about how difficult it has been for them to live under the repressive regime established by the armed group militants. Civilians continue to flee eastern Ghouta through the Muhayam-Al-Wafedin humanitarian corridor. There is real-time video of this running on the Russian Defence Ministry's official website. In just the past few days more than 520 civilians have left Douma. Russian agencies have organized the distribution to them of hot food, food kits and individual food rations, as well as bottled drinking water. Yesterday alone, Russian military doctors treated 111 civilians, including 42 children.

At the same time, the Russian Centre for Reconciliation continues to organize the return of residents of Saqba and Kafr Batna. On 24 March, as a result of an agreement reached by the Centre with leaders of illegal armed groups, another checkpoint was opened for fighters and their family members to leave from Harasta, Arbin, Zamalka, Ain Terma and Jobar. In the past few days, militias from the Ahrar Al-Sham

and Faylak Al-Rahman groups and their relatives have been evacuated along the corridor and bused to Idlib governorate. In three days, more than 13,000 people were evacuated from Arbin alone. However, many have decided to remain, taking advantage of the presidential amnesty. Incidentally, there have been active efforts to plant stories about detentions and torture and possibly even executions. They are lies. The Syrian police are ensuring that these operations are safe, under the oversight of specialists from the Russian Centre for Reconciliation and representatives of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. Yesterday 26 Syrian soldiers and civilians who had been taken prisoner by Faylak Al-Rahman were freed. In our view, those facts clearly attest to the difficulty and extent of the work being done by the Russian specialists on the ground, in communication with the Syrian authorities and the leaders of the armed groups. There are some members of the Security Council who prefer wasting their time on inflammatory speeches and letters making groundless claims about our country, probably to conceal their own unwillingness to do anything constructive to implement resolution 2401 (2018) in cooperation with the groups they sponsor.

At the same time, yesterday the fighters from Jaysh Al-Islam who remain in Douma detonated four mines yesterday in several districts in Damascus. Six civilians died and another six were wounded. Al-Mazraa, a residential neighbourhood in the capital was shelled earlier. As a result of mine explosions around the Al-Fayhaa sports complex, a 12-year-old boy died and seven children were injured. Hundreds of people have died from mine explosions in Damascus overall. This is apparently the message that the militants are sending every day about the willingness to implement the ceasefire that they loudly proclaimed in their famous letter to the Secretary-General.

I want to again point out the importance of clarifying the data used in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/138), including on possible attacks on civilian infrastructure and the victims of such attacks. Where does that information come from? The February report has a footnote that mentions various United Nations agencies and departments of the Secretariat. The main source cited is the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which does not have a staff presence on the ground. The big question, and what we are trying to get to the bottom of, is who is providing the United Nations staff with this kind of information? Is it the anti-Government groups and terrorist accomplices like the White Helmets? But they are interested parties. So why is there only a sprinkling of the information provided by the Syrian authorities?

We call on the United Nations, humanitarian organizations and States to deliver urgent assistance to help the people who are evacuating eastern Ghouta. It is also essential to strengthen the United Nations presence around the humanitarian corridors. The Syrians need immediate assistance with the infrastructure reconstruction that the Syrian Government has begun in the liberated residential areas of eastern Ghouta. We would like to ask Mr. Lowcock to oversee that issue personally.

We also hope that as soon as possible the coalition will create the conditions and provide the necessary security guarantees enabling a United Nations assessment mission to be sent to Raqqa and humanitarian convoys to the Rukban camp. The Syrian authorities gave their official consent to this some time ago, as Mark Lowcock confirmed today. We should note that we were shocked by the recent reports that more than 2,000 civilians may have died during the coalition forces' assault on Raqqa. Let me ask it once again — where were the weeping and wailing and calls for humanitarian aid then? We have noted the statistics in the Secretary-General's report on the numbers of people who have returned to Raqqa, but we would like to see similar information on other parts of Syria and the country as a whole. How many people are returning to their permanent homes? We would like to propose to the United Nations representatives that they designate the areas where those indicators are the highest as a priority for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and monitor how effectively it is being implemented.

We also think it would be appropriate to include information on reconstruction assistance in the reports. Resolution 2401 (2018) stipulates that Syrian districts, including those that have been liberated from terrorists, need support in restoring normal functioning and stability. One of the key areas in that regard is mine clearance. We get the feeling that external donors are losing interest in delivering assistance to residents in areas under Syrian Government control. We are seeing signals from some capitals that only opposition-held enclaves should be helped. Such double standards go completely against the core principles of neutrality and impartial humanitarian assistance. We hope that we are wrong about this and that Mr. Lowcock will refute the

possibility of such a trend. But if our suspicions are borne out, how does the United Nations intend to deal with the issue? Just the other day a meeting of senior officials was held in Oslo under the auspices of the United Nations and the European Union to address the humanitarian situation in Syria. No representatives of the Syrian authorities were invited. How does Mr. Lowcock view the prospect of another assessment of the humanitarian situation in Syria without the participation of its official representatives? Does he consider that a productive format? That is a very urgent question considering that the forthcoming second donor conference is scheduled for the end of April in Brussels.

I would also like to ask Mr. Lowcock what is known at the United Nations about the facts of sexual services being provided in exchange for humanitarian assistance in the context of cross-border operations. There is information about that in the November report of the United Nations Population Fund, and the BBC did a journalistic investigation of the issue. If this issue is known about, why is it avoided in the Secretary-General's reports? And if it is not known about, it should be investigated.

We hope that in close cooperation with the Syrian authorities and consideration of their views, the United Nations will agree on an emergency humanitarian response plan for this year as soon as possible, with an emphasis on the delivery of assistance to liberated areas.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to welcome you here today, Sir, and to commend the presidency's leadership. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his comprehensive but once again alarming update.

Like many around this table, we share a sense of urgency on this issue, especially following the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), which we adopted unanimously a month ago. Unfortunately, we have to recognize that it has not been implemented in the first 30 days since its adoption. We are meeting again when there has been no substantial change on the ground and the fighting is far from over. The military offensive in Syria continues and the human suffering is growing as a result. Any action, even against terrorists, cannot justify attacks on innocent civilians and civilian infrastructure, including health facilities. That must stop, and the parties to the conflict must strictly comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. Accountability for serious violations is a requirement under international law and central to achieving sustainable peace in Syria.

As indicated in the last report of the United Nations-mandated Commission of Inquiry, there is a need for the international community to take a broader view of accountability and to take urgent steps to ensure that the needs of Syrian conflict victims for justice and accountability are met both immediately and in the long term. We call upon all parties to alleviate the suffering of the civilians, including children, by granting them free and safe access to humanitarian assistance, including voluntary medical evacuation, which should be strictly overseen by the United Nations and the implementing partners in order to ensure the voluntary character of the process.

While discussing evacuations, let me underline that people must have the right to return and to a safe location for settlement. Any evacuation negotiations should also include civilians. Humanitarian aid convoys to eastern Ghouta must continue for those who choose to stay.

We would like to stress that all actors should use their full influence to immediately improve conditions on the ground. We urgently call for the cessation of hostilities in the whole of Syria. Attacks against civilians, civilian property and medical facilities must stop in order to alleviate the humanitarian suffering of the Syrian people.

Some small positive steps have taken place, such as a larger number of humanitarian convoys reaching the besieged areas in March, especially when compared to previous months, when humanitarian access was almost completely blocked. That improvement shows that it is possible to make progress, although much more is needed. In that context, we call on Russia, Iran and Turkey — as the European Union did, and as the High Representatives did through their respective ministers after the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union in February — to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities as Astana guarantors.

It is also important to note that the cessation of hostilities may also provide a chance for the peace talks under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva to gain momentum so that a political solution may finally be reached. Once again, let me underline that we should seek to reach an intra-Syrian framework political agreement, in line with Council resolution 2254 (2015). In that connection, we strongly believe that the conclusions of the Congress of Syrian

National Dialogue in Sochi could and should be used to advance the Geneva process, especially with regard to the creation of a constitutional committee by United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura.

In conclusion, let me stress the necessity of maintaining the unity of the Council on the question of the full implementation of the humanitarian resolution across Syria. The civilian population of Syria has already suffered too much. The adoption of the resolution was just the beginning of the process. We call on all with influence on the ground to take the necessary steps to ensure that the fighting stops, the Syrian people are protected and, finally, our joint humanitarian access and necessary medical evacuations continue.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome Mr. Stef Blok, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, to New York. We take this opportunity to congratulate him for the commendable presidency of the Netherlands during the month of March.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is grateful for the holding of this informative meeting, which enables us to once again assess humanitarian resolution 2401 (2018), which we approved one month ago. We thank Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock, who, as he always does, has just given us a very informative and detailed briefing on the developments on the ground in Syria.

The 30-day ceasefire throughout Syria, established under resolution 2401 (2018) in order to carry out humanitarian operations, has expired. Despite the diplomatic efforts of the United Nations team in Syria, violence has increased in eastern Ghouta, in Damascus, in Idlib and in Afrin, where there is an ongoing Turkish military offensive. Daily air strikes and bombardments have increased, including in residential areas, among Government forces, opposition forces and non-State armed groups, making it difficult to ensure the protection of all civilians and the immediate, secure and sustained provision of humanitarian aid. That excessive resurgence of violence, orchestrated by the various parties, only serves to exacerbate and aggravate the already grim humanitarian situation in those conflict zones.

As we have reiterated, the solution to the humanitarian crisis in Syria is tightly linked with a ceasefire. The prolongation of the conflict can only further aggravate the tragic humanitarian situation, which in turn creates greater instability and negatively affects neighbouring countries that take in the millions of refugees fleeing the war.

As the Secretary-General underlines in his 20 March report:

> "Our common objective" — and one of high priority — "should be to alleviate and end the suffering of the Syrian people. What the Syrian people need immediately has been made abundantly clear and affirmed in resolution 2401 (2018). Civilians need a cessation of hostilities, protection, access to basic goods and services" — and access to humanitarian and sanitary assistance — "and an end to sieges." (*S/2018/243, para. 48*)

All parties involved in the Syrian crisis must accept that none of them can achieve a military victory. Government forces, opposition forces and armed groups must accept that no matter how much death and destruction they cause in their country, there will be no victor but rather one single loser — the Syrian people. Similarly, national parties and international partners that have significant political and geostrategic interests and that have the capacity to exercise their influence on their respective allies must redouble their efforts and political commitments in order to bring sustainable peace and stability to the country. Any party that insists on political red lines that block the necessary commitments must also consider the setback caused by the loss of innocent human lives.

It is evident that the Council has not entirely reached its goal by unanimously adopting resolution 2401 (2018). The Republic of Equatorial Guinea will support any humanitarian initiative that seeks to definitively put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people.

In conclusion, I renew the tribute of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to Mr. Lowcock and to the entire humanitarian team of the United Nations for their noble and tireless work in Syria to provide relief to the Syrian people living through a humanitarian catastrophe.

Mr. Dah (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Like others, my delegation would like to welcome Mr. Stef Blok to New York and to congratulate him on the holding of the current meeting in the Security Council. My delegation also wishes to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for his informative briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

As we are all aware, the war in Syria has unleashed one of the most serious humanitarian crises in recent history and continues to have a devastating impact on the Syrian people. My country remains particularly concerned about the attacks and bombings, including those against hospitals and civilian infrastructure, that continue to punctuate the daily lives of people subjected to forced displacement in the areas of Afrin, Idlib and eastern Ghouta. Côte d'Ivoire condemns those actions and calls on the parties to take the steps necessary to protect people, civilian infrastructure and humanitarian personnel.

More than a month after its unanimous adoption by members of the Security Council, resolution 2401 (2018), on which so much hope was pinned, has fallen woefully short of our expectations, much to our regret. The fact is that the demand for an immediate cessation of hostilities to allow safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid and related services, as well as medical evacuation of the seriously ill and wounded, in accordance with relevant international humanitarian law, has still not been adhered to, despite our joint efforts.

The ongoing fighting has forced hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee to camps and makeshift shelters where living conditions are extremely difficult. Côte d'Ivoire calls once again for the effective implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) with a view to resuming the delivery of humanitarian aid, including medical evacuations from besieged areas and camps for internally displaced persons, in order to ease the suffering of people in distress. We urge the Council to overcome its differences and to demonstrate unity in order to ensure the effective implementation of the resolution, which is more relevant than ever.

My delegation reiterates its belief that the humanitarian situation will not improve unless significant progress is made at the political level, as the two issues are closely linked. We therefore encourage the parties to prioritize political dialogue and resume peace talks in the framework of the Geneva process, in accordance with the road map established by resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing. China commends the active efforts of the relevant United Nations agencies to alleviate the humanitarian situation in some areas of Syria.

The conflict in Syria is in its eighth year and has caused terrible suffering for the people of Syria. The humanitarian situation in parts of the country has recently deteriorated. China calls on all parties in Syria to put its country's future and destiny, as well as its people's safety, security and well-being first, cease hostilities and violence without delay, resolve their differences through dialogue and consultation and ease the humanitarian situation in Syria as soon as possible.

United Nations humanitarian convoys have now gained access to eastern Ghouta in order to deliver aid supplies to the people there. China welcomes Russia's establishment of temporary truces in eastern Ghouta, opening up a humanitarian corridor for Syrian civilians. As a result of the efforts of the parties concerned, some ceasefire agreements have been reached and a large number of civilians evacuated through the corridor. In the circumstances, it is important to continue to promote the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) so as to alleviate the humanitarian situation in areas such as eastern Ghouta.

China welcomes the meeting between Foreign Ministers held by Russia, Turkey and Iran in Astana, and commends Kazakhstan for hosting the meeting. We hope that the upcoming meeting of the Heads of State of the three countries and the next round of the Astana dialogue will contribute positively to restoring the ceasefire momentum in Syria and supporting the Geneva talks.

The international community should continue to support the role of the United Nations as the main mediator, and back Special Envoy de Mistura's diplomatic efforts to relaunch the Syrian political process.

Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity must be respected, and all Syrian parties must be encouraged to reach a political solution to the Syrian issue, based on the principle of the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned peace process, and in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), with a view to fundamentally easing the humanitarian situation in Syria and continuing to advance the counter-terrorism agenda, as mandated by the Council's resolutions. The Council should remain united on the Syrian issue and speak with one voice. China stands ready to work with the international community and to contribute actively and constructively to a political settlement of the Syrian issue.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): As the representative of Kuwait has already delivered a joint statement on our behalf, I will make my remarks very brief.

One month ago, the Council adopted resolution 2401 (2018) by consensus, in response to the deafening calls for action to address the horrific humanitarian situation in Syria. Today we have heard around this table a continued commitment to moving forward with the implementation of that important resolution. I wanted to speak last in order to identify some points of convergence. From the discussion today, I believe that there are a number of critical areas where there is broad agreement within the Council.

First, we all share a deep disappointment and sense of dissatisfaction and frustration with the lack of implementation. While a limited increase in access for humanitarian convoys shows that progress is possible, much more is needed. The resolution remains in force and all parties remain obliged to comply.

Secondly, we have heard a common concern about the continuing hostilities throughout the country, particularly the ongoing military offensive in eastern Ghouta. Those who leave the area should do so voluntarily, with the right to return and a choice of safe places to go to. At the same time, humanitarian aid convoys must continue to support those who choose to remain.

Thirdly, we agree that efforts to strengthen the protection of civilians must be stepped up by the United Nations and its partners, both inside eastern Ghouta and for those leaving and in the collective shelters. I want to emphasize that preventing sexual and gender-based violence should be an integral part of those efforts. We condemn the attacks in February that affected health facilities.

Many colleagues also reiterated today that resolution 2401 (2018) applies across the whole of the country. I just wanted to mention our concern about the Turkish operation in Afrin and the statements that Turkey has made about expanding its military operations in the north, beyond Afrin. We are also concerned about the protection of civilians fleeing Afrin, as well as the difficult conditions for those remaining. We call on all relevant parties, especially Turkey, to ensure the protection of civilians and facilitate cross-border and cross-line humanitarian aid deliveries, as well as freedom of movement, for internally displaced persons.

The need for the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) remains as urgent today as when it was adopted. As Ambassador Alotaibi has said, we will spare no effort in making progress on the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). We will continue to work actively and tirelessly to that end, be creative in considering possible further steps, and remain ready to reconvene the Council at any time should the situation warrant its renewed action. We are convinced that the unity of the Council, as difficult as it may be, is the only way to effectively make a real difference on the ground and alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. For our part, even when terribly frustrated, we will never give up trying to achieve that change.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to convey the condolences of the Government and people of my country to my colleague on the Russian Federation delegation in the wake of the tragic incident that claimed children's lives in the commercial centre in Kemerovo.

A few minutes ago, I was checking the list of the States members of the Security Council and I realized that two — only two — of its 15 members have embassies in Damascus. That is why the statements made by the representatives of those two countries offered the most accurate description of the humanitarian situation in my country. They were able to provide an objective and fair assessment of the situation there.

In late 2016, right here in the Chamber (see S/PV.7834), we announced the good news to our people in Syria that the Syrian Government would liberate eastern Aleppo from armed terrorist groups, and as a Government, an army and a responsible State we have done just that. Today we announce to our people the good news that the time has come to liberate all of eastern Ghouta from these armed terrorist groups. We declare that we will liberate the Golan, Afrin, Raqqa, Idlib and the rest of our occupied territory because, as a State, we reject the presence on our territory of any illegal armed group or occupying Power, regardless of the excuses, just like all other States represented in the Council. Such victories would not have been possible if we had no just cause. They would not have been possible without the sacrifices made by the Syrian Arab Army, the support of our people and the support of our allies and friends.

Facts that have come to light recently with the liberation of eastern Ghouta from armed terrorist groups again prove what we have always told the Council since the first day of the global terrorist war waged by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Israel, Turkey, the United States, the United Kingdom and France against my country. We said that the suffering of Syrians is the result of the practices of armed terrorist groups against civilians. The testimonies of the tens of thousands of our people leaving eastern Ghouta underscore that those groups have continued to deprive them of their freedom, destroy their livelihoods, disperse their families and prevent them from leaving to areas under State control in order to continue using them as human shields. They have seized control of humanitarian assistance in order to distribute it to their supporters or sell it to civilians at exorbitant prices. They have also targeted the safe corridors allocated by the Government with explosive bullets and mortar shelling, which has led to the death of dozens of people, including some Palestinian brethren.

We have borne witness to a state of hysteria in recent days and weeks in the Council as the Syrian Government has sought to exercise its sovereign right, combat terrorist groups and eliminate terrorists in Syria in order to restore security and stability to all Syrians and implement Council resolutions against terrorism. That state of hysteria proves that the States supporting those terrorist groups have never sought to end the suffering of Syrians. They have sought only to perpetuate and prolong their suffering in order to blackmail the Syrian Government, at the political and humanitarian levels, and save terrorists from their certain deaths. I would like to assure the supporters of terrorism, some of whom are present in this Chamber, that the plan that they have promoted for the past seven years has failed. Their plan was to deny that the Islamist takfiri groups were terrorists and instead present them as moderate Syrian opposition. That plan has failed.

Eastern Ghouta has not fallen, as my colleague the representative of the United States stated. It was liberated in the same way we liberated eastern Aleppo. It is terrorism that has fallen in eastern Ghouta, not civilians. As the representative of the United States said, today should be a day of shame for the supporters and sponsors of terrorism and terrorist groups. They have supported those terrorist groups for years in order to topple the Syrian Government by force in favour of Islamist takfiri groups. Such actions have led to considerable suffering among the Syrian people, and I have proof of it. Two days ago, at the Senate Armed Forces Committee, led by Senator Lindsey Graham, the Chief of Central Command, General Joseph Votel, stated that "the change of the Government in Syria by force in favour a number of Islamist opposition groups has failed".

The Security Council has to date held 49 formal meetings to discuss the so-called humanitarian situation in Syria and a number of informal emergency and Arria Formula meetings. The Council has read reports and heard briefings that were replete with falsehoods that senior officials of the United Nations sought to present in order to serve the policies of some influential Western countries that are members of the Council and to pressure the Syrian Government. Such reports and briefings were completely devoid of professionalism and objectivity. They have failed to take note of the attacks on the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, including the attacks by the international coalition, led by the United States, and those by the Turkish regime and the Israeli occupying force. Those same parties have also sought to provide all kinds of support to terrorist groups associated with Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and other militias fabricated in those countries.

After 49 reports and hundreds of meetings, briefings and thousands of working hours, some countries continue to refuse to recognize that the humanitarian crisis in Syria is the result of an external investment in terrorism and unilateral coercive measures. Forty-nine reports have been issued, and I say today that my words are falling on deaf ears. People from the Netherlands say that beautiful flowers have thorns. The Netherlands is famous for its flowers. Perhaps that saying reflects the situation on the ground.

Mr. Lowcock stated that the Kashkul was targeted by a missile but he did not specify its origin. He said there are eight shelters for those leaving eastern Ghouta. He did not mention the efforts of the Syrian Government to host the 150,000 civilians leaving eastern Ghouta. He does not know who manages those shelters. Perhaps aliens are taking care of the 150,000 civilians. Mr. Lowcock stated that the United Nations, its partners and the Syrian Red Crescent are helping people from Ghouta. He did not mention the Government at all. If the Government has no role to play, why ask it to help the Council? Why does the Council request its approval for the entry of humanitarian convoys? Mr. Lowcock stated that 153,000 people left Afrin and went to Tell

Rifaat because of military operations. Who forced 153,000 people to leave Afrin? Was it not Turkey that forced them to leave? Was it not the Turkish aggression against Afrin that forced these people to leave?

Mr. Lowcock mentioned the Syrian Government only once, saying that it approved the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Rukban camp. He did not say that the United States was behind the obstacles preventing the deployment of the humanitarian convoy in question. The United States occupies the Rukban camp and the Tanf area. I will not go into detail now for the sake of time. I will not even go into the details of the forty-ninth report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/243). I will give only one example to prove that the report lacks objectivity and impartiality.

The report devotes nine paragraphs to the suffering of civilians in eastern Ghouta and the damage to the infrastructure there as a result of Government military operations, as the report claims — nine paragraphs. As for the situation of the 8 million civilians in Damascus, the targeting by terrorist groups of the capital with more than 2,500 missiles, the killing and injury of thousands, and the destruction of homes, hospitals and clinics, the report dedicates only one sentence to Damascus. The report says,

> "Attacks on residential neighbourhoods of Damascus also continued from eastern Ghouta, resulting in deaths, injuries and damage to civilian infrastructure." (*S/2018/243, para. 8*)

We hope that the United Nations will not adopt in eastern Ghouta the same approach that it has taken in previous situations by not providing support to the areas liberated or achieving reconciliation. We hope that the United Nations will adopt a new approach in line with the Charter and international law, based on full coordination and cooperation with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, which is the only party concerned with the protection and support of Syrians. We hope that the United Nations will not succumb to the dictates of certain influential Western countries in the Council that run counter to humanitarian action, the Charter and international law.

During the past week alone, the Syrian Ministry of Commerce has distributed 4,000 tons of food to civilians leaving eastern Ghouta. I am not sure about the sources mentioned by the representative of France, because France does not have an embassy in Damascus. So its sources of information cannot be credible.

In conclusion, the States sponsoring terrorism have instructed armed terrorist groups to use chemical weapons once again in Syria. I ask the Council to pay attention to this information. They asked them to fabricate evidence, as they have in the past, in order to accuse the Syrian Government. We sent this information to the President of the Security Council yesterday. According to that information, this theatrical act will be produced by the intelligence agencies of these countries, and the starring roles will be the White Helmets. The production will be directed by foreign media. This theatrical act will take place this time in the areas close to the separation line in the Syrian occupied Golan. Terrorist groups will use poison gas against civilians in Al-Harra. Afterwards, the injured will be moved to the hospitals of the Israeli enemy for treatment there. Council members can already imagine the testimony that will be offered by doctors of the Israeli occupation forces.

The information we submitted also refers to another theatrical act in the villages of Habit and Qalb Lawza in the suburbs of Idlib, where a number of satellite transmitters and foreign experts have been spotted. This time, the cast will include women and children from an internally displaced persons camp on the Syrian-Turkish border. Once again, I provide the Council with this serious information.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.